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With Your Host

Jody Moore

Better Than Happy with Jody Moore

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*, where we dive deep into the tools, truths, and transformations that help you live and lead with more clarity, courage, and compassion.

In today's episode, we're talking about something that quietly shapes so many of our decisions, reactions, and patterns: emotional pain. But not just any emotional pain. We're exploring the difference between clean pain and dirty pain. What they are, how to tell them apart, and why this distinction could be the key to moving through life with more freedom and less suffering.

If you've ever found yourself stuck in resentment, shame, avoidance, or rumination, this one's for you. Because not all pain is bad. Some pain heals and refines. Other pain just repeats. Let's talk about the difference and what to do about it. Welcome to *Better Than Happy* Episode 512: Clean Pain and Dirty Pain.

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*, the podcast where we transform our lives by transforming ourselves. My name is Jody Moore. In the decade-plus I've been working with clients as a Master Certified Coach, I've helped tens of thousands of people to become empowered. And from empowered, the things that seemed hard become trivial, and the things that seemed impossible become available, and suddenly, a whole new world of desire and possibility open up to you. And what do you do with that?

Well, that's the question... what will you do? Let's find out.

Sometimes, listening to a podcast is enough. But sometimes, you'll feel inspired to go deeper. If you hear things that speak to you in today's episode, consider it your invitation to a complimentary coaching workshop.

On this live, interactive Zoom call with me, you'll get a taste of the power of this work when applied in real life. You can participate, or be a silent observer. But you have to take a step if you want to truly see change in your life... two steps, actually. Head to JodyMoore.com/freecoaching and

register. Then you just have to show up. Your best life is waiting for you. Will you show up for it? JodyMoore.com/freecoaching. I'll see you there.

What's happening? You having a good week? You having a good day? Are you making it a good day or a good week? If not, that's okay. But if you want to, you can, anytime you want. It's your choice, just saying.

Okay, so today's episode, I'm recording because a couple things. First of all, I was speaking at a conference for a business the other day. So much fun, by the way, speaking at businesses who have no idea who I am or what my work is about and coming in and teaching some tools and doing some coaching. I could do that every day. Super exciting.

But anyway, I was doing that and I mentioned the concept of clean pain and dirty pain kind of briefly as I was coaching someone, and I sort of spoke to it a little, but I unintentionally didn't really flesh out the definition very well. And afterwards, someone came up to me and she said, "What was dirty pain? You said what clean pain was, but you didn't say dirty pain and I really am fascinated by that concept." I'm like, "Oh yeah, you're right. I should finish that if I'm going to bring it up, I should finish teaching it."

Anyway, it is a really fascinating concept. It's not one that I came up with. I don't know who created it originally, but it's used in the world of psychology and behavioral science and therapy and things. And I found it to be really powerful. I'm going to talk to you about the way I think about it and use it. But the second thing that happened is one of my clients said to me, "Can you teach me more about clean pain and dirty pain? Do you have a podcast on that?" And I was like, "Yeah, I totally do." And then I went through the podcast trying to find it and I was like, "Maybe I don't. Maybe I don't. Maybe I ve never recorded an episode on this." So, I'm recording it now. And if there is one, I couldn't find it. So my guess is you can't find it either. And we're just going to talk about it again because I do kind of love this concept.

And just like any concept though or any tool, it can be weaponized if you're not careful. You can use it against yourself in a harmful way or to judge others or things. Please don't do that. I'm going to try to caution you as to what that might look like so that we don't do that. It is just an idea. It's just an idea that can be helpful, but if it's not helpful, just throw it out. Like any idea, right?

Okay, so let me begin by just reminding us that our ultimate power, and power's such a weird word to use, but I'm not sure if there's a better one. So, I'm sticking with that one. Where we become empowered, where we have the most control over our current experience and then what we're creating for the future. That's what I mean by power, okay? I don't mean controlling others. I mean power over yourself and what you're creating. Our ultimate power comes from focusing on what we think, feel, and do.

That is what we have control over. What we think, feel, and do. And by that, I mean that is where we have the most control. We don't even have full control over that though, right? We can't completely control our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions. Like, thoughts will just come into our heads without us intentionally directing them, and we can't control all of it, but we can control some of it. We can control much more of what we think, feel, and do than we can control of what other people think or feel or do.

We have very little control over the world outside of us. We have some influence on the world outside of us, but the extent to which we can affect the world outside of us is so much less than the extent to which we can affect the world inside of us. And so that's why I'm constantly trying to redirect us all to what's happening inside of us. That is where we become empowered. You with me? What we think, what we feel, and what we do. Okay?

So, given that, what tends to happen most of the time in life is we focus on that part about what we do. We do that for our own selves when we're looking for help and we do that with others. In other words, we give out a lot of advice to each other. We say things like, "You know what you should

say?" after our friend tells us about maybe her daughter who's struggling, like, "You should say this to her. You should try that," or, "You should make this phone call," or, "You should try this thing." And we ask other people, "What do you think I should do?" Especially when we're pursuing goals, right? We love to have people who we trust, who maybe have achieved the goal or who we think know how to achieve the goal. Tell me what to do. If you just tell me what to do, I'll just do it, right?

So we focus a lot on the do part. Nothing wrong with that because we do have the ability to choose what we're going to do. That is an area where we can affect things, but it's just not the end of the story. Just looking at what we do doesn't get us nearly as far or doesn't create the long-term effects that we want in our lives, true happiness, true joy, true evolvement, as focusing on all three of them: what we think and what we feel and what we do. Okay?

And so this tool of clean pain and dirty pain speaks to the feeling line, but it also speaks to the thinking part, the thought line, we call it in coaching, right? The thinking part of what we do as much as the feeling part because what it does is give us a way to think about our feelings that can be useful. Does that make sense? Okay. So that's what we're focusing on here today.

So, let me go ahead and define the way I think about clean pain and dirty pain. And again, when I say pain, I'm talking about emotional pain. I'm not talking about the sensation of like touching something really sharp and getting cut. That's physical pain. So heat, hot, cold, even usually fatigue, hunger, those kinds of sensations I'm not talking about. I'm talking about emotions. Okay? Sadness, grief, anger, overwhelm, frustration, irritation, annoyance, disappointment, worry, terror, fear. Okay? These are all the kinds of pain I'm talking about, boredom, loneliness, etc. I could go on all day, right?

So clean pain is a really beautiful part of the human experience. It's expansive. It makes us more of the kind of people we want to be, even though it's painful. And we may not see the effects it's having on us until

after we kind of move through it to a certain extent, but it is really useful and I dare say even spiritual.

I'm going to give a scenario of my past life job. I worked in corporate and at one point, I was let go from my corporate job that I'd had for like 15 years. Okay? So being let go from that job, I was very sad because I loved that job. I loved the people that I'd met there. I came to love the company. And there were a lot of things about it I was going to miss. And so there's sort of a grieving that happens in that type of situation, right?

That's clean pain. That's appropriate. That's necessary. That's useful. That could help move me through a situation in a really useful way. And it could help refine me and make me more patient, more loving, more kind, more generous, more of all the things I want to be on the other side of having that painful experience of losing this job. You can see how that would happen.

Now, dirty pain doesn't move us through an experience. It keeps us stuck in an experience. So the dirty pain would be if after losing that job, and here's what happened for me, is after I lost my job, I started getting messages from some people I knew at the company, some who were still there, some who had also been let go, who said things like, "Hey, we started a website where everybody can communicate about what's going on and..." what it was in the end, the website was like a bunch of people complaining and, you know, throwing shade at all the people who they felt were responsible for this. Bunch of people story fondling about how this isn't fair, this isn't right, talking negatively about people or about the organization or whatever. Like a place to go bitching, moan, and complain, if you will.

That would be dirty pain, right? You can feel how that kind of pain actually is tempting to indulge in. You know why? It can connect us to one another. If another employee and I get on there and we start complaining about this company and I can't believe they did this and they handled it all wrong, we feel connected because we both feel the same way. We validate each other. We even add to each other's stories. And then we feel connected.

And there's something that feels really powerful about that to us. But it's still painful. Because disliking things is uncomfortable. We're still mad. We're still hurt. We're still sad underneath it all. We just added a little bit of like self-righteousness or judgment or something on top of them, which don't feel good, but our brains for some reason prefer the illusion of being one up that gives us instead of the illusion we otherwise create of being one down.

Okay? So that's the difference. Clean pain moves us through an experience. It's very healing, it's very cleansing, it's very expansive. Dirty pain keeps us stuck in an experience. It's limiting. It reduces us or others in some way. And it's kind of the difference between clean pain would make us better on the other side of something, whereas dirty pain makes us bitter on the other side of something. Okay? Does that make sense?

So, let's talk about why this can be a useful tool and what to do to make sure you don't use it against yourself. So, first thing I want to say. Both clean pain and dirty pain are totally allowed. And both of them are part of the human experience. I don't know any mentally healthy humans who don't experience both clean pain and dirty pain at times. Natural, normal. So I don't want you to go, wait a second, this is dirty pain. I shouldn't be feeling it. I'm not supposed to feel this. This is bad or this is wrong. That's not what I'm saying at all.

Whatever emotions you're feeling, whether it's clean pain or dirty pain, you're feeling it because there's been a chemical or hormone released in your body. Okay? We have cortisol, adrenaline, serotonin, dopamine, all these hormones that get released in the body or neurotransmitters, we might call them, right? And then we experience the way those feel inside our bodies. That's what we call emotions. It's literally all that's happening, okay?

So, once you're feeling it, telling yourself, "I shouldn't be feeling this," doesn't get rid of it. That neurotransmitter has already been released. It's already active in your body for some reason. Okay? And in fact, what you do then is release more neurotransmitters that feel negative by thinking, "I

shouldn't be feeling this," because now you have some guilt or some self judgment or something else releasing more negativity. Okay? This is why resisting emotions doesn't work.

So, let's just talk about what you can do. It's okay to do other things. By the way, my friends, most of what we're doing to avoid emotions is not really terrible. A lot of it anyway. Some of it can be, I guess, more harmful, of course, than others. But most of it is not even that bad. When I talk about escaping, avoiding, or resisting emotions, what most of you are probably doing is not that big of a deal. Like you're pushing it away, you're tightening against it.

You're maybe eating food or shopping online or whatever scrolling social media, doing a lot of things that are not morally wrong, I wouldn't say, right? And not even creating necessarily a major problem. Of course, they can get out of hand, but many of you are not creating major problems. You're just doing things other than feeling feelings because you don't know how to feel feelings.

So please let me be clear. It's not that you shouldn't do those things. That you shouldn't escape, you shouldn't avoid, you shouldn't resist. It's just that you don't have to. You don't have to. Once you're feeling a feeling in your body, whether it's clean pain or dirty pain, what I want to recommend that you try out is opening up and allowing it.

So one of my coaches that is in coach training with me right now, we were we've been talking about emotions the last couple weeks and she said today in our class, "Oh, I just had this total insight that when you say get in your body and feel the feeling, what does it feel like? Where is it in your body? How can you just experience it more? It's not because I need to be able to correctly identify what it is or where it is. It's just because having that experience of just opening up and allowing it is so much better for me than the alternative." I was like, "Yes, that's exactly right."

I'm not saying you should be able to name it the right name and you should be able to, can't you see that it's here in your chest or it's here in your stomach? No, we're not There's not a right answer here. There's no right way to name it or describe it or experience it. I'm just saying if you open up to it and allow it, it's so much less painful. There's so much less suffering in allowing emotions than there is in blocking, resisting, or avoiding emotions. Okay?

So this is so important for you to understand because the only reason we don't open up and feel feelings is because we're afraid of them. And the reason we're afraid of them is because as we resist them, they get stronger and more intense and they do start to feel unbearable, intolerable. We then are afraid to let the people around us feel them because we don't want them to have that experience either. And then we teach them to resist, avoid. Every time we try to talk our kids out of feeling bad, we are teaching them it's not good to feel bad, that they shouldn't feel bad, that they don't need to feel bad. But guess what? Being a human being, you're going to need to feel bad sometimes. Okay?

So the more you open up to and allow emotions, the more you can be present for other people to have emotions and not have to hurry and fix and change their emotions so that you can feel better. I know I'm guilty of this anyway at times. I was going to say we're all guilty of it. Maybe some of you are not, but I know I am. Most of us are guilty of this at times. So the key is to understand that negative emotions are not dangerous.

Now, let's bring this back to clean and dirty pain. Okay? So, clean pain, I especially want to open up to. I want to fully experience the clean pain because it's not only is it part of being alive. It's all part of being alive. But clean pain is actually a beautiful part of being alive. I mean, if you're spiritual like me, I hate to say it. I wish I could say like my most spiritual experiences have been positive. There've been a few. Like my wedding day and the day that each of my kids was born, I would say were high spiritual experiences that were filled with mostly positive emotions.

But other really powerful spiritual experiences that I've had in my life, most of them have come during times of emotional pain and distress. That is when I turn to God or I feel God's love or I don't know if it's me. I don't know how the spirit works. I just know that those are the refining moments that help me like get a tiny glimpse into what really matters and kind of clean up the other drama and noise, right? So clean pain, really useful, beautiful part of the human experience.

It's going to be things like, and I'm going to give you some lists here, but I just want to preface it with, I'm not saying make a list. These things are clean pain. These things are dirty pain. We have to do is check it out. Does this feel like an appropriate way that I would want to feel in this situation and a way that I need to allow for a while that will then move me through the situation? Or does this feel unnecessary? Does this feel somewhat immature? Does this feel the opposite of spiritual? What's the opposite of spiritual? Carnal maybe.

So clean pain is often sadness, grief. And grief is kind of a blanket term we use to describe a whole bunch of different emotions. So grief can include a bunch of things like anger, denial, bargaining. You know, you have the like the traditional definition of grief. But I guess the way I check it out for me is I just go, wait, does this feel like an appropriate way to feel as I let go of something that I'm sad about letting go of in order to move to the new place and that I need to allow myself to go through this whole process of letting go. However long it takes, it might take a long time, my friends, that's okay. However long it takes for me to heal so that I can be refined from it and move to the next thing, does this feel like part of that process? Or does this feel like me indulging in the getting stuck of dirty pain?

Okay, so grief. Disappointment is often a clean pain. Sometimes I would say even worry maybe can be clean. Oftentimes it's dirty, but it could be a clean pain. Sometimes fear can even be clean pain. Especially after like some kind of trauma, if you will, and then you might have fear about a certain topic. Totally understandable. Okay? Again, that's how I know it's

clean pain is if I can think about what I'm experiencing, what the situation is that I'm thinking thoughts about that are creating this experience and ask myself, like, is it understandable that I would be thinking those thoughts right now? Yeah, it is. It makes sense. And I kind of want to just keep them and I'm going to now open up and allow these emotions.

Not only allow them, lean way into them. Experience them as much as I possibly can. Now again, why am I experiencing them as much as I can? Not to get rid of them, just because experiencing them, leaning into them makes them less painful. There's less suffering. It makes them less scary, less overwhelming, less outside of my control. Okay.

Now, dirty pain on the other hand tends to be things like self pity, resentment, blame, shame, guilt, usually overwhelm or indecision or confusion or frustration or resentment. These things are going to be dirty pain and usually worry as well. Okay?

So dirty pain again, not wrong. Please hear me say this, not wrong or bad. Just not as refining and spiritual and connecting and not necessary. I think that's the main thing I hope that part of your mind will hear me say. Because when I feel something come up that I know is dirty pain, like I said, usually worry is dirty pain.

So if I notice my brain want to be worried about something, worry's always about the future, right? What if this thing doesn't happen or does happen? Or what if this goes wrong? Or what if this person struggles? Or what if this doesn't get better? That's all worry. Okay? When I notice it come up and I feel the worry, remember if I already have that chemical happening in my body, I'm just going to open up to it. But I also say to myself, this isn't necessary. We don't have to do this. You don't have to worry about this. There's no upside to worrying here. It's not important. It's not useful. It's not going to prevent a possible problem even.

And here's the interesting part. Let's say I'm worried about running out of money. Okay, maybe I'm afraid I'm going to run out of money and my brain

is trying to indulge in worry. If I do run out of money, whatever that means, right? If I run out of money, then I will have a situation on my hands that I might want to feel some clean pain about. But I can process that pain and I can focus on what I'm going to think and what I'm going to feel and what I'm going to do now in my life. And that would be a healthy, useful, expansive circumstance, right?

But sitting here worrying that I might run out of money when I also very well may not run out of money is none of those things. It's not expansive, useful, and it doesn't prevent me from running out of money. In fact, it makes it more likely that I will run out of money, which would be fine because that would be an interesting, expansive, possibly spiritual experience. But the worry just isn't necessary and useful. Do you see what I'm saying?

So I still want you to open up to it, take deep breaths, and allow it. I just want you to all the while know that this is not necessary. I don't have to worry if I don't want to. That way you don't keep thinking worry thoughts that release more of those chemicals. Okay.

Last thing I want to say about this topic is part of the reason I think it's so powerful to identify clean pain and dirty pain is because in a lot of life situations, we have both. There's oftentimes some clean pain that would be appropriate and necessary and useful. And then there's dirty pain that our human brains just invite or somebody else offers to us with best of intentions or what have you, right?

And what I like to remember is that we tend to go to dirty pain in order to avoid the clean pain in many instances. Like rather than be sad about, let's say, my child leaving the home. Rather than grieve that and be sad and lonely, even though I want my child to succeed and go out into the world and do whatever they want to do, right? There's a sadness, there's a grief there.

Rather than be sad, it's tempting to the brain to start to get annoyed with a bunch of little things going on around us. To get overwhelmed with all the

decisions that have to be made or to be stressed about money or to worry about what might happen to the child or to start fighting with my spouse over whose responsibility it is to figure out college or to get annoyed with my child for something that he or she is not doing.

All of this is dirty pain, right? It's associated with the same topic, but it's dirty pain. We often do it because we're avoiding the clean pain. Because we're afraid that sadness will just swallow us whole. And I want to tell you something. It won't. It won't if you open up and relax and lean into it. I don't mean run away with the thoughts in your head about it. I mean get into your body and take breaths and process the sadness. Just be sad.

Just remind yourself, okay, I'm going to be sad today. It's okay to be sad. I'm only sad because of sentences in my head. I'm not actually sad because my child's moving out of the house. I'm sad because of sentences in my head and I want to be sad. Just going to be sad right now. Let's just do that. What do I need to do? How do I want to be sad today? Do I want to just let the sadness kind of sit by me in my chair as I go to work and I show up and I do my job? Or do I want to go for a long drive and cry and listen to some sad music and let myself lean into some sadness? What do I want to do? I'm going to be sad today. What's it going to look like? How do I want to do sadness? Or do I want to just see kind of what comes up?

So I just want to be clear. I'm not talking about spinning on thoughts in your head and making the story bigger and scarier and more dramatic than it needs to be. I'm just talking about opening it up like, I guess I need to be sad today. I guess I'll do that today. I'll just I'll do sadness.

Listen, we do things every day that we don't want to do. Like I got to do laundry and I got to go to the post office and wait in a long line and I got to do sadness. That's what we're going to do today. Okay? And the sadness is going to come and go as it pleases. I don't mean that we get to organize it and check a box. I'm just saying we can do things like this. And sadness is very refining and cleansing usually.

So that's clean pain. We want to allow that and lean into that rather than escape it because the temptation usually is to go to more dirty pain than necessary. Whose fault is this? Who can I be mad at about this? Who do I blame for this? That's all dirty pain. It's not going to move you through. Again, it's not wrong to do. I don't want you to feel guilty about it. I just want you to know it's not moving you through the experience like the clean pain will.

A lot of times clean pain is in the form of self-pity, feeling sorry for ourselves. And self-pity, I think can be really easily confused with selfcompassion. Okay? Because it is useful to be tender with yourself when you're in pain. To take extra good care of yourself physically, emotionally, spiritually. Like really, it's the time to indulge in self-care when you're in a lot of emotional pain.

But that's not the same as going, "Poor me. Why does this always happen to me? Why do I have to be the one to deal with this? Why have I had such a hard life? Why me? This isn't fair." Right? It's kind of what self-pity sounds like and it can take on slightly different verbage, of course, in your head, but that's kind of the idea behind self-pity.

So I remember going through something one time. And by the way, let me preface this by saying, please don't say this to your friends who are struggling or your family who are struggling. This is an example that happened in a coaching session and it's different when somebody signs up to work with a coach or a therapist or someone on their pain. That coach or therapist needs to get sometimes a little bit tough and tell them the truth to help them. When we do it to someone and it's not in a coaching or a therapy session, it's gaslighting. Okay? So please don't think I'm telling you to use this to help other people around you. This is a tool to use on yourself.

At any rate, so I was going through some hard things and our family was, in fact. And some of the things happening were things that everybody, for the most part, would agree are really hard things. And there's a lot of clean

pain there that I would I wanted to feel sad about it. I needed to and it would be appropriate to, right?

But I was talking to my coach. I was getting coached one day, and I was sharing what was going on. And at one point I said, "It's just not fair. Nothing seems to be helping or working and this has just been going on for so long." And my coach said, "Whoa, don't start feeling sorry for yourself." And it took me off guard because the topic was a heavy, sensitive one that most everybody really indulges in the pain with me over, which is fine and appropriate and good.

But in a coaching session, again, it's different. And when my coach - she sort of showed me that it's okay not to feel the dirty pain even. And I know that sounds weird because you'd think that would be obvious, but it's not. When you're in the thick of something, it feels so justified and necessary and righteous and like kind of the only option to indulge in this dirty pain.

And when she did that and was like, "Whoa, you don't need to feel sorry for yourself here." And there was still compassion over the clean pain, right? But she did not get in the pool with me, we say in coaching. She didn't buy into the fact that like obviously I'm also going to feel sorry for myself. And that for me was very empowering.

It kind of made me be like, "Yeah, I don't need to feel sorry for myself or make this any more dramatic." I feel like that's what dirty pain does. Makes it very dramatic, very heavy, even more painful. And so just recognizing it helped me stop doing that. Helped me be like, "Yeah, there's pain here and I'm going to open up to it and it's not my favorite part of life. But there is something also really inspiring about it and I don't have to add on the part where I'm like, poor me, this is so hard."

Now, that worked well in that situation. And just for the record, as I'm saying it out loud, I'm recalling all the times in my recent life even that I have had that kind of energy and those kinds of thoughts of like, poor me, poor us,

this is so hard. Things that I don't even have any clean pain about necessarily, that I don't need to have clean pain about.

So that's the kind of stuff that you want to bring to coaching. I mean, you can bring any of it to me when I'm coaching you. But especially the things that you're like, I know I'm just kind of wallowing here in self pity or drama. I'm making things more dramatic here. Coaching is really powerful for unwinding that and you can get out of that very quickly with a good coach.

All right, my friends. That is clean pain and dirty pain. I'm sorry to have to be talking about such a bummer subject today, but you know what? The more I learn how to allow feelings and help other people process feelings, the more I see that, gosh, it makes us all so lovable, to be honest. And it helps us turn to and rely on one another. And it really is, unfortunately, the way that we become more of who we're meant to be.

I will leave you with this thought. This is just my thought. This is please don't think I'm saying this is church doctrine. But for those of you that are members of the LDS church or who are Christian like myself, we know that Christ experienced all emotions. And yet Christ was perfect, right? So if he was perfect and he had perfect thoughts and perfect actions and I don't know what that means exactly that he was perfect, but that's kind of the way we think about it.

So if he was perfect, then he didn't have dirty pain, right? He only had clean pain. And sometimes I wonder if that's maybe why he had to suffer in the Garden of Gethsemane and experience all emotions in a way that wasn't created by his thoughts. Because he had to experience everything we experience and at the same time, he was perfect. And so he didn't experience dirty pain.

Anyway, I don't know if that's right. It's just something I kind of wonder about. All right. Thank you for joining me today. I love you all. I will see you next time on another episode. Bye.

Oh wow, look at that. You made it to the end. Your time and attention is valuable, and I don't take it lightly that you made it this far. In fact, it tells me you might be like me; insatiably curious about people and life and potential and connection. Maybe you have big dreams but a small budget and no time. You're tired, but bored. You're content, but dissatisfied. Sound familiar? Come to a free coaching call and see for yourself what's possible: JodyMoore.com/freecoaching to register. That's JodyMoore.com/ freecoaching.